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Discussion

By MEYER BLOOMFIELD

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I HAVE recently been through a series of sessions with foremen in a number of eastern factories, and the one question that I was interested in getting their answer to was this: "Just what is the situation with regard to production in your own department, in your own factory; the present situation as compared with that of six months ago, or a year or two ago?" I was trying to get some definite information as to just what the production situation is and what the reasons were for a condition that must give and does give everybody real concern.

Surely in a situation so grave as we believe the present to be, the least that the average citizen has the right to expect is a clear statement of what is happening to that output of goods and services on which not only industrial peace but our very existence also depends. Not only suffering Europe, but our own land as well must look to sufficient production for salvation.

After hearing a good deal of testimony that was honest and intelligent, there seemed to be three distinct divisions that one could make of the information given. One group seemed to be generalizing without any basis of knowledge. Perhaps production was not below par, considering conditions; at any rate the men seemed to be unwilling to exert themselves. This was one class of testimony. Another group seemed to be unconsciously betraying a condition for which executive indolence or incapacity could be the only explanation. The third group confessed that a situation existed that called for some real heart-searching on the part of management. This candor

promises most by way of meeting the problem as it should be met.

Obviously we cannot go far with generalizations as to the production situation and we only confuse the issue and make a solution well nigh impossible if we content ourselves with vague assumptions of industrial slacking as the basic evil. That there is slacking no one disputes. Men who take money for the least possible return are a social menace. They are millstones around the necks of their fellows. In normal times such men are unemployed or unemployable. But any study of such facts as may be had would show that laying the blame on one party alone does not tell the whole story or help us to see the way out. Only in seeing that the right amount of production is as much a problem of management as it is of labor can we hope to think straight on this question.

Almost the unanimous response from all the foremen to the question, "Do the old workmen produce as much as they have in the past?" was, "Why, of course, there's no trouble with the older men, with those who have been here three, four and five years. In fact, some of them produce more than they ever did before."

"Well, is it the trouble with the new men, with the more recent comers?"

"Yes, it is."

That brings up a problem of training, of initiation into the job, of relationship, of patience, of contacts, of policies. I hope that when we talk about the need for more production we will not view it entirely as a one-sided matter, namely, the slacking of labor. I hope that we may see it too in terms

of the necessity perhaps, for better head work, on the part of management than hitherto; the sort of brain work that we do find in the best managed organizations, where we do not hear so much fault-finding.

May I say that when we hear plans described such as those above, we are impressed with one very interesting point about them. These are activities that have grown up from within. They are natural to the soil out of

which they grow. They are not patented importations. The lazy employer who expects his labor problems to be solved for him by wireless is riding for a fall. A good way to solve one's own labor situation is to trust the people one is with day after day. I believe that there is enough wisdom, if we pay the price in thought, in effort and time, to work out each his best solution from within.